

MIT Open Access Articles

The Accompaniment: Assembling the Contemporary

The MIT Faculty has made this article openly available. **Please share** how this access benefits you. Your story matters.

Citation: Fischer, Michael M. J. "The Accompaniment: Assembling the Contemporary." *American Anthropologist* 116, 1 (March 2014): 226–227 © 2014 American Anthropological Association

As Published: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/AMAN.12085_39

Publisher: Wiley-Blackwell

Persistent URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/116121>

Version: Final published version: final published article, as it appeared in a journal, conference proceedings, or other formally published context

Terms of Use: Article is made available in accordance with the publisher's policy and may be subject to US copyright law. Please refer to the publisher's site for terms of use.



and silent, instructive gestures. Throughout, young surgeons learn in these bodily and social engagements that control is a virtue and that with every action there is risk of harm. This is the essence of what Prentice calls “medical embodiment”: surgeons’ cultivation of judgment about where and when to cut (and when not to) by accumulating a range of bodily experiences while operating.

Thick descriptions of surgery allow Prentice to build productively on existing theories of embodiment. She argues for a broad view that extends beyond material acts to include things that are too often considered not realizable through practice, such as affect, emotion, intuition, judgment, and ethics—all things located in the surgeons’ bodily dispositions. These are also connected to what comprises good medical care in current configurations of biotechnical medicine.

The third domain of training in *Bodies in Formation* is computer simulations of anatomy and surgical procedures. Even as designers strive for fidelity to reality, virtual learning lacks the social context of a cadaver and the risk of harming an actual patient undergoing surgery. As such, the pedagogical focus becomes repeating technical skills not

on cultivating judgment around the vital ethic of surgical control.

Bodies in Formation shows the author’s impressive ability to perceive nuance in and to bring new perspectives to a topic that has been extensively studied in the past. For good reasons, she made a deliberate choice to focus on how surgeons relate to patient bodies in the operating room. But one wonders what kind of embodied processes are missed when we are not privy to how the same surgeons engage awake patients who bear the scars of surgeons’ craft. Furthermore, there is limited consideration of how the extreme physical demands of surgical residency, including sleep deprivation, play a role in the cultivation of embodied affect and clinical reason. There is a brief discussion of recent restrictions on resident work hours but little attention to operating in states of fatigue.

Overall, *Bodies in Formation* is an important and unique contribution to literatures on biomedical training, the development of perception, and embodiment. Prentice expertly weaves different aspects of training into subtle but clear arguments about bodily practice and technological innovation as central to the formation of an ethical subject and to care.

The Accompaniment: Assembling the Contemporary

Paul Rabinow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. 248 pp.

Michael M. J. Fischer

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

In the best of part I’s four chapters in *The Accompaniment*, Paul Rabinow points out that Michel Foucault was not an engaged intellectual, that he wanted to keep his distance from immediate political responses, that (quoting Foucault) he strove for “a mode of permanent and refractory relationship with politics . . . philosophy’s problem is not to liberate the subject” (p. 97). Rabinow would like to style himself in a similar manner of “adjacency” and adopt the affect of *thumos* (“spirited anger”), which produced “white hot” lucidity in Foucault’s response to historians (p. 64). In the sadder (affect of *pathos*) essays on Clifford Geertz, Rabinow adopts the opinions of the shallowest of anthropology’s critics: (a) cultural relativism is the inability to make evaluative judgments (rather than a methodological obligation of at least listening before judging) and (b) the analysis of symbolic forms can only be translation into Western categories reducing the Other to the Same (rather than following the anthropologists’ and linguists’ traditions of asking how Western categories cause methodological problems for such translation). Too bad Rabinow is unable to make the connection between this work in anthropology and its forms in Foucault (“philosophical fragments in the workshop of history” [p. 64]) and to broaden the conversation beyond Europe.

Making such connections might provide the accompaniments, collaborations, and ways forward that Rabinow claims to want; it would at least provide an affect of generosity and friendship rather than the Nietzschean antagonism (parading as mere intellectual agons) against the “blinded knowledge seekers” that he claims as method (p. 4).

The role of the university and its government-funded research centers remains underanalyzed. Rabinow chastises Edward Shils and others who, in the aftermath of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s attacks on the university, attempted, perhaps misguidedly, to defend the space of the university against politicization in the civil rights and Vietnam War battles of the 1960s. But there are many slippages in Rabinow’s polemic conflating Weberian distinctions between science as technical (value neutral) and political choice of topic (value relevant), with the distinction between science and power, as well as conflating incursions of the military industrial complex on the university with those of the market and audit culture in the present. What any of this has to do (perhaps a lot) with Rabinow’s dismissal as the principal investigator (PI) for human practices at SynBERC (the NSF-funded synthetic biology coalition) remains unclear.

In part II, two important issues are raised and then evaded. First is the ways in which the research seminar (and university) needs to be reinvented now that many students come with work experience with governments or NGOs

in war-torn areas or with severe environmental problems (p. 128). Second is the powerful embedding of the work practices of the contemporary biosciences in a financial and entrepreneurial complex that encompasses governments, businesses, and academia. Rabinow has experimented with what he calls a “labinar” (lab-seminar) and with two websites, without acknowledging or collaborating with others (with a few minor exceptions) who have been engaged in similar work, and has restricted his collaboration largely to his own graduate students. Instead of acknowledging, recontextualizing, and reanimating the many collaborative research endeavors in anthropology, he simply claims they are all forgotten or discredited (p. 115). With this rhetorical sleight of hand, he can claim that anthropology is resolutely individualistic. Ironically, with his mode of engagement and his limiting of collaboration to his own graduate students, he becomes a prime exemplar of such individualism. We learn little about synthetic biology (here or in either of his other main texts on the topic), and key moments in the history of SynBERC are reported only as they affect him: we do not learn what the substance was, for instance, of the “dramatic” fight between Drew Endy and lawyer Stephen Mauer that got the latter dismissed and Rabinow and Kenneth Oye of MIT invited to replace Mauer until Rabinow himself was dismissed. The essays in part II suffer from what Rabinow himself calls their “formalism,” and much of the content on synthetic biology, SynBERC, and

postgenomics is claimed to have already been covered in his other writings: however, for instance, a footnote on postgenomics is only to his book *French DNA* (1999) on a genomics project (p. 158), and the claim that *Designing Human Practices* (2012) contains his account of synthetic biology is not supported (one learns almost nothing about the field there nor is there acknowledgment of the anthropology of work practices).

Rabinow has much to offer, and perhaps someday he will drop his defenses, irritations (p. 141), ethnomethodology of how to arrange chairs in a seminar room (p. 128), and claims to being untimely and actually provide a substantive account of, if not SynBERC, at least the issues in the course on genomics and citizenship that he taught with molecular biologist Roger Brent. Until then we have to make do with sentences like “Concepts as opposed to theory need to be constantly adjusted, remediated, and ramified” (p. 121), in which the reason that theories need no adjusting is left to one’s best imaginative fantasies.

REFERENCES CITED

Rabinow, Paul

1999 *French DNA: Trouble in Purgatory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2012 *Designing Human Practices: An Experiment with Synthetic Biology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora

Junaid Rana. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 240 pp.

Ahmed Afzal

State University of New York

Terrifying Muslims is a masterful study of the South Asian labor diaspora. The study focuses on transnational Pakistani labor migrants in a variety of historical, national, and cultural contexts and makes a compelling case for “the Muslim” as not only a religious category but also as a racial category that has in fact been central to global racial formations. Drawing on history, media and film representation, and ethnographic evidence, Junaid Rana’s comparative and multisited analysis is one of the few in-depth studies of Pakistani labor movements in the post-9/11 epoch and is an essential contribution to Asian studies and Asian American studies. However, the reach of this outstanding work extends far beyond diaspora studies and post-9/11 ethnographies of Muslim Americans. Indeed, *Terrifying Muslims* will be a necessary and vital reference in future scholarship on international migration and globalization, critical race studies, the state, transnational religion, neoliberal capitalism, and criminality and terror.

Organized into two main sections, the first three chapters form part I, “Racializing Muslims.” Theorizing global racial formations, in chapter 1, Rana traces the racialization of Muslims to interactions between the New World and Old World, conceptions of European and U.S. Orientalism, the transatlantic slave trade, empire building, and flawed scientific theorizing around race in the early 20th century. Significantly, these historical contexts converge to produce anti-Muslim racism that endures into the present.

Chapter 2 builds on such historical contexts to examine Islamophobia in the late 20th century and the early 21st century. In the 1980s–2000s, U.S. foreign policy constructed terrorism as enemy of the state and as a legitimate site of state violence and biopolitics. Equally, it marked and produced certain nationality groups, such as Pakistani immigrants, as a terror threat. Using notions such as moral panic and Islamic peril and terror, Rana shows how global racial systems incorporate the “dangerous Muslim” as a racial category that is policed by the state. This category is central in anti-immigrant ideologies, practices, and narratives that construct illegality